A STUDY OF EXISTENTIAL CRISIS OF WOMEN IN THE SELECT PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR, GIRISH KARNAD AND MAHESH DATTANI

A

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Mr. CHAVAN VINOD VIJAYKUMAR

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

Dr. RAJARAM C. JADHAV

HEAD, DEPT OF ENGLISH

SHIVAJI MAHAVIDYALAYA, RENAPUR

DIST. LATUR

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Introduction

Literature is a comprehensive reflection of life. It is highly considered as a medium to express self-representation and the socio-cultural concerns of the writer. It is a platform to reveal the intricate manners in which men and women classify themselves as well as their insight into the socio-cultural and political reality.

Poetry, Drama, Fiction and Non-fiction are the common forms of literature. It may also be stated as something beyond historical or cultural artifact. However, the implication of literature depends mainly on the perception of the reader or the audience. This does not confine to literature as a constant factor but permeates to all other domains as well. With the changes over the years or rather with the Cultural Revolution across the globe, literature also keeps changing. Donald Barthelme expresses his feelings towards literature that *"The aim of literature ... is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart".*

Drama is one of the important branches of literature. It is meant to be performed on the stage. It contains a message that should be delivered properly through the stage performance. Drama presents the human life before the audience. The ultimate purpose of drama is to define the meaning of life. In ancient times the dramatic performances were taken place only in temples. As we know religion strongly effects on human being. Religion for the common man offers purpose of living. Themes of the drama were derived from scriptures, myths and legends. The classical language was used for drama. It was a Sanskrit language. The sage Bharat Muni supposed to be the predecessor in the field of Indian drama. The Indian English drama flourished in British regime in India. Krishnan Mohan Banerjee is considered to be as the first Indian English dramatist. He published, *'The persecuted'* in 1831. Thereafter, Rabindranath Tagore and Shri Aurobindo contributed hugely for the development of Indian English drama.

Though slowly Indian drama in English has registered its promising presence in the post-independence period Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh and Girish Karnad deserve credit because they not only wrote plays but also successfully staged them with their exchanged activities. Now the second generation has stepped into their

shoes. Ratnakar Mathkari, Premanand Gajvi, Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani are the playwright of contemporary Indian drama. All of them are more prolific in play writing. Mahesh Dattani is the most modern and most devoted to the theatre activities of all the contemporary play wrights.

Today the contemporary society is witnessing an extraordinary spectacle of women's liberation movements all over the world. It is a universal movement and Indian society is no exception to it. We have the voices of feminism in the writings of several writers since the 13th century to the present such as Janabai, Tarabai Shinde, Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Kamala Markendeya, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande and so on. However, even in the 21st century, society is male dominated. It is for this reason that women have been marginalized despite their fifty percent population in the world. Biologically as well as culturally, human beings are divided into two classes: men and women. This division is further accentuated by the roles they are assigned to play in the making of a family. Man is the head of the family, governing and controlling all its affairs. Woman is entrusted with the household responsibilities, particularly those of cooking food and rearing children. This leads to the formation of exploitative and oppressive society of men as against the exploited and oppressed society of women. Quite a good number of works in the postmodern period illustrate how women are exploited in various ways. The inhuman treatment that they receive from the male dominated society indicates that they lose their freedom first and their lives later for the sake of man. Ideally speaking, it is sacrifice, but realistically speaking, it is sheer wastage physical as well as mental, on the part of women.

Vijay Tendulkar: A Profile

Vijay Tendulkar, winner of Sangeet Natak Akademi Award 1970, one of the most leading and all-rounder personalities, was a leading Indian playwright, essayist, political journalist, and script writer for movie and television. He was also a social commentator. He was a rebellious Marathi writer. At the age of six, he wrote his first story. He was tremendously inspired by the western plays and began his career as an actor, writer, and director at the tender age of eleven. He was also an active member of 1942 Indian Freedom movement.

Tendulkar often shows how society marginalize women and denies them the fundamental rights as being a woman. His concern lies with the exploitation and mental harassment with woman. His plays delve deep into the realities of life in

contemporary social milieu. He states, “As a social being I am against all exploitation, and I passionately feel that all exploitation must end.”

Tendulkar was a prolific writer, and his contribution is noteworthy. He wrote thirty full-length plays in Marathi and ten plays were translated into English. He is very much interested in dealing with the syndrome of power and violence. In his plays, Tendulkar presents female characters as fodder to male. They are often undergone physical and mental violence. He explores the relationship between men and women at different levels. He highlights male dominance in the patriarchal set up. He understands the psychology of all the characters and present them together in all their natural colours.

Tendulkar’s *Sakharam Binder*, the controversial play, was performed in 1972 and it was banned in India in 1974. The play has been translated in many languages. It is a commentary on complexity of human nature. The protagonist of the story Sakharam, a bookbinder, is in habit of picking up discarded women which are deserted by other men. He treats them as domestic servants and sex partners. Moreover, Sakharam offers them freedom to leave if they wish. Through the two discarded women – Champa and Lakshmi – Tendulkar explores the complexity of human nature. The play highlights issues related to love, sex, ethical values, domestic violence, and marital rape. Although the story is of a post-colonial India, its relevance remains as long as patriarchal system exists in our society. Tendulkar takes on not only the institution of marriage but also the accepted moral standards associated with it.

Silence! The Court is in Session takes place in India during the mid-1900s. It was a time when women started liberating themselves and making their impression in the workforce. But contemporary men and women held traditional views of gender roles that men would earn money and they were free. Women are supposed to confine in the four walls and serve men. The characters of the play primarily belong to middle-class working men and women. Although living comfortably, they are nonetheless obsessed with status, and much of the play involves the cast subtly fighting for superiority. This infighting is depicted as petty, and status as less important than solid values and a sense of right and wrong. Middle-class society is shown to be a restrictive trap. While it provides comfort for the individuals within it, it also creates a stressful environment in which people fight for limited power and

prestige, ignoring their own happiness and the happiness and wellbeing of those around them.

Girish Karnad: A Profile

Girish Karnad, the actor, director, writer and playwright was a multifaceted personality in Indian literature. The Jnanpith Awardee wrote many plays, mainly in Kannada, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues. He was awarded Padma Shri (1974), Padma Bhushan (1992) and Sahitya Academy Award in 1994.

Girish Karnad depicts socio-cultural aspects and practices in the society into his plays. His main concern lies with liberation of women from the rigid control and evil practices prevalent in Indian society. His women characters show multiple dimensions. He often tries to establish the independent identity of women in his plays. He exposes how women have been controlled and exploited since the ages in male-dominated society in the name of gender, values, and ethics. Women, who are responsible to define human relationship, are in core in his plays. His women characters are radical in nature. They follow the established norms keeping their individual intact. Sometimes, they will not care for social norms to fulfil their desire.

Karnad's play *Naga-Mandala* is originally written in Kannada and published in 1990. Rani, a newly married girl, is the central figure of the play. She has tied a marriage knot with Appanna. She starts her new life with him and has multiple expectations, desires, and dreams. But Appanna, a typical example of patriarchal mind set, treats her as if she were a mere servant. The play is a tale of male chauvinism that debilitates and degrades females and rests on the exploitation and incarceration of women. Girish Karnad has presented the issue of female chastity in the play. Traditionally, chastity is primarily related to woman. She must take a lot of care for it. Even Sita, a famous character in the Ramayana, is not exception for it. She has undergone a 'fire test' to prove her chastity. It is the traditional concept used to establish superiority of male to female and to weaken them an individual. Girish Karnad presents 'snake ordeal' for Rani to prove her chastity in Naga-Mandala. The concept 'ordeal' is related with only women from ancient age to modern age.

Karnad's another play *Broken Images* takes up a debate that has grown steadily since 1947—the politics of language in Indian literary culture, specifically in relation to modern Indian languages and English. The play deals with a Kannada woman writer who unexpectedly produces an international bestseller in English.

Mahesh Dattani: A Profile

Mahesh Dattani is an Indian director, actor, playwright, and writer. He came under the influence of Edward Albee's 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf' which resulted to develop his interest in writing. He won the Sahitya Academy Award for his book of plays *Final Solution and Other Plays.* His important plays are Where There's a Will (1988), Dance Like a Man (1989), Bravely Fought the Queen (1991), Final Solutions (1993) and Do the Needful.

The plays of Dattani are very powerful in nature. He makes clever use of Indian mythology, tradition, and culture to explore them in his plays. He speaks about the gap in the family, love, happiness, sex and emptiness of life. Often his plays have the capacity to shake and fracture the very cultural foundation. This kind of poison has already knocked at the metropolitan cities in India.

Bravely Fought the Queen is one of the important plays of Mahesh Dattani. The action of the play moves around an Indian family. There are two male protagonists – Nitin and Jiten. They run an advertising agency. Alka and Dolly are sisters and married to Nitin and Jiten respectively. The play throws light on how the male in the family are exploiting female. Much of the tension in the play is generated from female brigade. Both the female – Alka and Dolly- are leading a lonely and frustrated life. They do not enjoy the freedom and busy in artificial life. They desire for some space and love from the husband.

Dattani's another play *Tara* is a portrayal of the failure of marital relationship between Patel and Bharati. Once again Dattani keeps family in the core. Like several other plays, the characters in the play *Tara* have their own way to bear the burden of social values. All of them tries to go beyond the social values.

The proposed research aims at exploring existential crisis in the select plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. The proposed study will be a minute study that will bring forward the personality of women in virtual and real world. The select plays show a sordid picture of patriarchal social structure and the sham moral standards of Indian society where women undergo a series of sufferings as the victims of the hegemonic power structure. The select plays represent an environment of social structure with two different facets of women's personality. Some of them apparently looks silent sufferers of intrigue, hypocrisy, greed, brutality of male dominated society while some of them are quite rebellious, bold,

revolutionary, and courageous in nature. The plays of all the three renowned playwright focuses on the root cause of gender inequality in the dominated tendencies of men. The select plays for the study also throws ample light on the spirit of women for individual rights, respect, independent life, self-identity, quest for completeness and emancipation from agonies of life-long tortures.

Objectives of Study

The aims and objectives of proposed research are as follows:

1. To study the place and position of women in male dominated Indian society represented by Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, and Vijay Tendulkar in their select plays.
2. To project feminine sensibility of women who appears as conservative, oppressed, voiceless, orthodox, religious, and self-sacrificing in the select plays.
3. To depict feminist sensibility of women who reacts as revolutionary, rebellious, social-aware, liberal, rational, and aggressive for equal rights and in search of self-entity.
4. To analyze the hegemonic power structure of Indian society where women viewed as a mere object and placed as marginalized one.
5. To investigate the male dominance in Indian middle-class family where women become silent sufferers of endless miseries.
6. To understand the female psyche in the select plays in relation with traditional orthodox principle of religion and social structure where they live and how they dare to face tragic problems of life.

Scope and Limitation

The broad area of the present study is the study of existential crisis of women. It is significant to study the playwright from this point of view as it will give us a complete insight to understand the nature and temperament of the society.

The present study will be confined to following select plays and dramatists:

Vijay Tendulkar	1. Sakharam Binder
	2. Silence! The Court is in Session.
Girish Karnad	1. Nagamandala
	2. Broken Images
Mahesh Dattani	1. Bravely Fought the Queen
	2. Tara

Review of Literature

It is observed that Vijay Tendulkar's special forte two-fold while depicting female characters – patriarchal dominance and feminine frailty. He projected women as a victim who willingly or unwillingly accept the dominance of male-counterparts and suffered a lot. They were treated as a fodder to men. They do not have equal status with men and, sometimes, part with their individual dignity, too. They are exploited both socially and economically. There is no doubt that male ego and male superiority are the causes of their agony. Still women surrender to it and remain contributory to it. Here, the playwrights seem to attack the Indian women's conservative minds, which do not allow them to show guts in encounter with their male-companions. Woman, in any role, is supposed to be the best supporter in emotional failure of men. Male-ego never permits them to accept the assistance of women even in their downfall. The tendency of enduring exploitation is so deep-rooted in their bones that even the thought of rebellion does not arise in their minds. The women surrender the situation and show their respect towards male dominance at the cost of their individual identity. The women characters appear to be the mute witnesses of the womankind's endless suffering in Indian society for centuries.

It is not so in Girish Karnad. His women rebel and by their protestations declare their independence. In this sense of being "free", they are really "new women'. It is observed that his characters such as Padmini in Hayavadana, Rani in Nagamandala, Devayani, Sharmistha, and Chitralekha in Yayati and Vijaya in Encounter in Umbugland, are in sharp contrast with other female characters in the different plays. Rani, the protagonist of Nagamandala, is initially one of slavish type, but later grows in stature as a rebel and turns table on her husband by avenging the wrong to her and by being publicly and privately venerated.

Mahesh Dattani deals with the theme of gender discrimination in his play. His play exposes the typical mindset that prefers a male child to a female child such as in Tara. In this way, the playwright focuses on the marginalization of women. His plays also deal with the emotional and physical separation. He focuses on the deep-rooted patriarchal system in the society. Women act as a key in the hands of patriarchy to perpetuate patriarchal values.

Research problem

1. What is the status of women in the contemporary society?
2. What is the reason behind women's exploitation?
3. Whether women are equally treated with their male counterparts?
4. Whether Parents have equal approach towards al children?
5. Is existential crisis of the women characters in the select plays same as women in the contemporary society?

Hypothesis

The present study aims at studying existential crisis of women in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, and Mahesh Dattani. The proposed research focuses on following hypotheses:

1. It is believed in the Indian society that woman essentially need male support for her smooth life. She has no entity without her male-counterpart in society.
2. It is the tragedy of woman since ancient to modern times that she has been used as only a tool to fulfil all demands in family and society.
3. It is one of the principles of the male - dominated society that woman must do household duties without any complain. In addition, she must follow the principle of chastity, customs, and norms in the family.
4. Emotions, feelings, zeal of love, her quest for perfection, her futile effort of being self-reliant, the spirit of defense has less importance in the oppressed social structure of society.
5. Feminist sensibility in the select plays underlines women's striving for acquiring freedom, equality, and privileges as human being.

Data Collection

Data for the present research work will be collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources will be the select plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. The secondary sources will consist of research articles published in research journals. In addition to this, websites of different reputed libraries will be consulted along with INFLIBNET and Shodhganga.

Research Methodology

The proposed research is pursued by using the basic methods of literary research such as close reading, explication, illustration, and analysis. However, the major focus is on the socio-cultural aspects. Critical analysis is the central agenda of the proposed research. Since the researcher would like to undertake a deep critical study of the plays, the methodology of research adopted for this work will be interpretative and analytical in nature.

The Significance of Research Work

The present study aims to find out existential crisis of women in the select plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. This study is significant as it tries to analyze the hegemonic power structure of Indian society where women viewed as a mere object and placed as marginalized one. It is also significant as it helps to understand the female psyche in the select plays in relation with traditional orthodox principle of religion and social structure where they live and how they dare to face tragic problems of life. The study is also important as it focuses on the basic form of representation of life in the real sense and how it is marginalized by society.

Plan of the Thesis

Chapter **1: Introduction**

Chapter **2: Existential Crisis in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar's** (Sakharam Binder and Silence! The Court in Session)

Chapter **3: Existential Crisis in the plays of Girish Karnad's**

(Naga mandala and Broken Images)

Chapter **4: Existential Crisis in the plays of Mahesh Dattani's**

(Tara and Bravely Fought the Queen.)

Chapter **5: Chapter 5 of this Thesis is the conclusion.** In this chapter, the researcher is going to sum up, the overall tone and message.

Outline of the Research

Chapter 1: Chapter 1 of this Research is **Introduction.** In this chapter researcher will carry out the brief survey of Indian English dramas in general and

contribution made by the important dramatist with some of their most important plays are given scope.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2 of this research is **Existential Crisis in the plays of Vijay Tendulakr's** (Sakharam Binder and Silence! The Court in Session) is a serious attempt to expose characters. Researcher will analyze women characters on social, cultural, ideological and feminist ground. The crisis of women will be interpreted.

Chapter 3: In this chapter, **Existential Crisis in the plays of Girish Karnad's** (Naga mandala and Broken Images) the researcher will interpret the women characters' position in the context of contemporary Indian society and the struggle of women to take care of their desires and to achieve them by finding their own ways.

Chapter 4: There is an analysis of man-woman relations and matrimonial relation as presented in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. In this chapter, the researcher will focus on the systematic analysis of the women characters in the select plays.

Chapter 5: The last chapter is **conclusion**, will bring into light all the key findings, analysis of all the existential crisis of women in the select plays of the playwrights. It will be evaluated systematically.

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Place -

Date -

Researche Scholar **Research Supervisor**

Vinod V. Chavan **Dr. Rajaram C. Jadhav**